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INFO RUEHAR/AMEMBASSY ACCRA 0519
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NIAMEY 000595

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [NG](#)

SUBJECT: NIGER: MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS (MFA) SUMMONS
AMBASSADOR RE:PRESS RELEASE REJECTING REFERENDUM; DEFENDS
ENDING POLITICAL IMPASSE

REF: A. NIAMEY 593

[1](#)B. NIAMEY 381

Classified By: CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR BERNADETTE M. ALLEN, REASONS: 1
.4 B/D

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Government of Niger (GON) MFA Secretary General Dan Maradi summoned Ambassador Allen on August 17 to voice complaints regarding communication between the MFA and the Embassy leading up to the latter,s August 14 press release rejecting the results of the August 4 constitutional referendum. Although Dan Maradi,s complaints are groundless, he nonetheless made an effort to explain the administration,s need to hold the referendum to surmount political blockage. Dan Maradi inquired about how the bilateral relationship might change, and expressed hopes that food assistance would not be terminated. Ambassador Allen also provided Dan Maradi with a new press release that calls on the GON to free detained civil rights activist Marou Amadou and journalist Abdoulaye Tiemogo. (Note: GON Foreign Minister Aichatou Mindaoudou is out of the country. End note.) End summary.

Sec Gen Maradi,s Complaint: Process over Substance

[1](#)2. (C) During a one-hour meeting on August 17 at the request of MFA Secretary General Adam Abdoulaye Dan Maradi, who summoned Ambassador Allen, the former complained at length regarding the lack of communication that preceded the August 14 release by the Embassy of a press release wherein the United States rejected the August 4 constitutional referendum. MFA Director for the Americas, Asia, and Oceania Sani Nana Aicha Andia and USEmbassy Deputy Chief of Mission Eric Whitaker both participated as notetakers. Claiming the press release came as a &surprise,8 Dan Maradi maintained that the MFA had not received a diplomatic note sent in July requesting a meeting to discuss what the time was a pending August 4 referendum, and complained that proper procedure had not been followed to communicate on issues relating to bilateral concern.

[1](#)3. (C) Ambassador Allen responded by stating that the Embassy,s diplomatic note had indeed been delivered, and had gone unanswered. Furthermore, repeated telephone calls regarding the requested meeting had gone without response. Summarizing, she noted that lack of a responses to the diplomatic note requesting a meeting and follow up phone

calls on the same matter were taken as a message from the GON. Dan Maradi responded that this was an incorrect interpretation, and that the MFA was open and accessible to her for discussion on issues. He said he hopes that the USG provides earlier notice to permit dialogue with the GON on matters of disagreement before releasing messages to the press. He alleged not to have received the courtesy copy of the press release delivered by the Embassy to the MFA at opening of business Friday, August 13, alleged it was over the weekend that the press release came to his attention.

14. (C) Dan Maradi stated that the Cotonou Accord bound Niger to discuss such issues with its European Union partners, and that the GON had a duty to meet EU representatives to do so. This did not, however, involve the United States. He also complained about the lack of MFA awareness of all Embassy contacts with the Presidency. Ambassador Allen noted that there were two separate requests for meetings; one involving a proposed meeting with EU Troika representatives on the Cotonou Accord and a separate one for a joint demarche with the EU Troika and her to discuss our mutual concerns about the political situation. She noted that her concern was the latter request, not the one related to the Cotonou Accord. With regard to a prior meeting in May that the Ambassador held with President Tandja (ref b), contacts with the Presidency spun away from her specific request to see the President one-on-one, a fact made known to the MFA.

Sec Gen Maradi: Political Blockage Forced Referendum

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15. (C) Sec Gen Dan Maradi changed tack by steering toward substantive issues. He challenged the press release's assertion that the August 4 constitutional referendum did not represent the will of the Nigerien people. Ambassador Allen noted the lack of queues at polling stations throughout Niamey on the day of the referendum, and that the issue was foisted on a largely uneducated, illiterate citizenry without opposing views having the opportunity to be heard, in contrast to the full resources of the state being used to urge a &yes8 vote. Dan Maradi disagreed, and claimed that rural participation in voting had been high. He said that there were few election observers, and that the opposition itself had opted not to debate the merits of the referendum. Dan Maradi made several references to freedom of association and of the press, and asserted that the referendum had been both open and transparent.

16. (C) Dan Maradi also claimed that a lack of collaboration among the legislative, judicial, and executive branches of the GON) &connivance8 - had resulted in a political blockage. In particular, the actions of the Constitutional Court had resulted in &interference8 with respect to the GON; while members of the Court were free to act as they wished, they were responsible to President Tandja, who had appointed them himself. President Tandja thus had responded by dissolving both the National Assembly and the Constitutional Court, and electing to rule by decree. The constitutional referendum followed as an effort to provide a more efficient and effective mechanism through a presidential, rather than semi-presidential system.

Sec Gen Dan Maradi: What Assistance is at Stake?

17. (C) Dan Maradi followed by asking for clarification regarding the last line of the press release, which dealt with the unwillingness of the United States to continue its support and engagement with the GON. He spoke of how the departure of USAID in 1998 following the military coup had an adverse affect on the most vulnerable communities in Niger. Ambassador Allen cited as possible examples government-to-government assistance, such as training courses offered by the U.S. military to its counterparts, as well as raining or programs offered in country by other U..

Government Departments (e.g Treasury and Labor) to civil servant counterparts. She added that while humanitarian assistance is likely to continue that it remains to be seen what will be defined as humanitarian. Washington, she followed, is reviewing our engagements closely in deciding which assistance to maintain. Dan Maradi noted the GON hopes that food assistance would continue, particularly that channeled through NGOs.

A Second Press Release: Human Rights also Matter

18. (C) At the end of the meeting, Ambassador Allen presented Sec Gen Dan Maradi with an advance copy of a press release calling on the GON to release civil society activist Marou Amadou and journalist Abdoulaye Tiemogo (ref a). Dan Maradi accepted it somberly, and ended the meeting by expressing his hopes for a better level of U.S.-Nigerien understanding.

Comment

19. (C) It was clear that the Presidency had MFA Sec Gen Dan Maradi summon Ambassador Allen, and convey GON pique at its press release, despite refusing numerous requests for a meeting in recent weeks. His complaints, largely consisting of transparent misstatements concerning exchanges (or lack of exchanges) between the MFA and the Embassy, were unconvincing, as was his attempt to rationalize the need for President Tandja to rule by decree and forge ahead with a constitutional referendum to put an end to political blockage that had stalled the nation's progress.

ALLEN